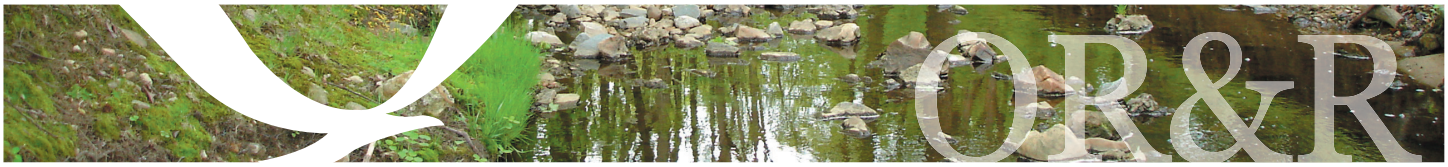

Buzzards Bay Oil Spill in Massachusetts

A cooperative natural resource damage assessment

On April 27, 2003, the Bouchard Barge 120 struck an obstacle in Buzzards Bay, creating a twelve-foot rupture in the hull of the barge and spilling between 22,000 and 98,000 gallons of No. 6 fuel oil. The Trustees for this incident, in cooperation with the responsible party, Bouchard Transportation Co., are investigating impacts to shoreline habitat, numerous bird species, aquatic resources and recreational uses of the bay resulting from the spill.

The Natural Resource Trustees (Trustees) for this incident include; NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the State of Rhode Island. Trustees are designated federal and state agencies who act on behalf of the public to: assess natural resource injuries; identify, evaluate and select appropriate restoration projects; and implement, or oversee the implementation of, the selected restoration projects. The Trustees conduct a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) to accomplish these tasks. NOAA, as the lead administrative trustee, is coordinating the NRDA for this spill. Bouchard, the responsible party that owns the barge and the tug and was operating the vessels at the time of the spill, has been actively cooperating with the Trustees.

Injury Assessment

The Trustees, in cooperation with Bouchard and its representatives, have surveyed shorelines, collected and analyzed oil, water, sediment, and shellfish tissue samples, and are monitoring data on oiled and dead birds, and examining recreational uses of Buzzards Bay. To date, the trustees have identified the following potential injury categories —

- Shorelines
- Birds and Wildlife
- Aquatic Resources
- Recreational Uses

The Trustees completed a Preliminary Assessment Data Report (PADR) and submitted it to the Administrative Record that has been established for the case. The PADR provides further details regarding the potential injury categories and the Trustees' determination to conduct further assessment and restoration planning activities. The public can view the PADR at either of the two local repositories referenced below.

Restoration Planning

The Trustees will develop a Draft Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan (Draft DARP) when they have collected sufficient information. This plan will describe the categories and magnitude of natural resource injuries and service losses resulting form the spill and present information on the appropriate type and scale of proposed restoration projects to address those injuries and losses. The public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft plan. After the public review and comment period, the Trustees will select appropriate restoration projects to be implemented by the Trustees with funds from the responsible party and/or implemented by the responsible party per Trustee specifications and oversight.

The Public's Role

The Trustees have begun meeting, and will continue to meet, with citizens, community and environmental groups, and local and regional officials to: explain the NRDA process; share information regarding potential injuries and losses resulting from this incident; begin soliciting ideas for appropriate restoration projects. The public will be invited to review and comment on the Draft DARP.

Administrative Record Repositories

Bourne Public Library
Diane Ranney, Asst. Director
Jonathan Bourne Library
Bourne, MA 02532
(508) 759-0644

New Bedford Public Library
Teresa Coish, Library Director
613 Pleasant Street
New Bedford, MA 02740-6203
(508) 991-6279

Contacts

To learn more, please visit our project website at:
http://www.darrp.noaa.gov/northeast/buzzard/index.html, or contact—

James Hoff
NOAA
(301) 713 – 3038 ext. 188
James.hoff@noaa.gov

NOAA's Office of Response & Restoration—Protecting our Coastal Environment

For further information about NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration, please visit our Web site at

http://response.restoration.noaa.gov or call (301) 713-2989.

U.S. Department of Commerce • National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration October 2006